



Accolade

By Valma Clark

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"The Answering Child," etc.



PETER MURRAY, a lank boy in the tight uniform of the marines with the little, round, white cap pushed back on his blond head, stopped at last before a palatial, biscuit-colored hotel in Menton and gulped a breath of relief. This place—the hotel in sharp sunlight with its lawn, its row of palms, its clean, gravel drive, with the purple-blue Mediterranean at its front yard and the precipitous gray Alps at its back yard—was right. Theo was right.

Peter felt again to make sure that Theo's token, the tiny gold heart which she had traded him for his fraternity pin on his last night in Delaware, Ohio, was safe in his pocket; he carried it there, wrapped up in tin-foil, with his money and his keys, because he had a superstition that anything which you guarded too closely you were bound to lose. The gold heart had kept Peter out of some messes. Now with Theo herself in view—Peter's quivering, tight muscles relaxed. Let him just get a firm grip on Theo's small, chilly hand, let him get a guiding palm upon Theo's stiff, little dancing backbone!

It was September since he had seen Theo, and this was February. Theodosia Pratt had been Peter's real reason for joining the navy. He had been unjustly accused of a particularly stupid and wholesale piece of vandalism per-

petrated by some humorist who had broken into the high-school building by night. Peter had been unable to produce an alibi, owing to the fact that he and Bob Reilly had had Theo and Peggy McClaren up at the fraternity house on a lark on that evening, a thing strictly forbidden without a chaperon; Peter couldn't tell where he had been without finishing Theo with her aunt, with the whole town. So in his senior year he had been expelled from school. He had stood before a navy billboard with pictures of palm trees, and with a large gesture of recklessness had bet Bob Reilly a fiver that he would be in the navy within twenty-four hours. He had collected the fiver. Since he had missed the war because of his youth, and since the lure of battles and foreign lands was strong for him, Peter had been jubilant. Theo had been the only sore point, and she had confided to him her aunt's plan of a winter on the Riviera and had suggested that Peter might see her over there.

When they had laid in overnight at Monaco—so tantalizingly close to Theo!—with no leave and no time to get word to her, Peter had chafed and despaired.

Then had come luck; Cherbourg and a ten-day's furlough; Paris with Alchin, Magruger and Kellogg—Peter's mouth went wry. Now here!

Just one point bothered Peter—money. But he had Magruger's word that they would wire him the money. Peter had been the only one of the quartet who was not flat broke when they struck Paris, and they had stripped him, pointing out that their need was greater than his. Peter had been forced reluctantly to the admission of his own need.

"A—a girl." He had guarded from contact with them Theodosia's name.

They greeted it with enthusiasm and wise jibes.

"If that was the way it was——"

"That was the way it was," Peter assured them earnestly.

They were glad to hear it; glad to welcome in the "Little Brother of the Main." They had called him that, derisively, ever since they had found him devouring a child's edition of "The Life and Adventures of Captain Kidd."

But he could count on Magruger. Peter was still troubled by one scruple: he knew how the fellows would raise money, and, while he didn't object to gambling, still he couldn't quite stomach the idea of putting poker winnings into a ring for Theo.

Yet the ring was essential. If he could only go back an engaged man, sealed and stamped, Peter thought, it would be an inviolable guarantee, to the others and to himself—yet would it? There was Haynes, the ship's doctor, a handsome fellow, "a prince," the men called him, but with a look to his eyes and his mouth which Peter in the last five months had come to know. Haynes was a married man, and yet they all laughed—Haynes himself laughed openly—about what his wife would say if she knew. Peter would just like to see any one laugh about what Theo would say!

He ranged up the graveled drive, slouched, rather diffidently, past the impudent eyes of a gold-buttoned door boy.

"Is there a telegram for Peter Murray?" he asked at the desk.

The Frenchman with a waxed moustache suspiciously denied it. Peter hesitated. With the little money he had, did he dare risk it? It looked a most expensive hotel, and Theo's aunt was notoriously well-to-do. But the Frenchman was measuring him superciliously; Peter, feeling out of place in these rose-and-gilt spaces in his job's blue, winced and defied him. It was for two days at the most, and the telegram was sure to come. He would take a room.

The Frenchman doubted whether he had a free room. A horsey-looking Englishwoman would know the way to St. Agnes; the man left Peter, and, bowing profusely, described for her five ways.

"Interestin' heap o' rocks, with a fair café," she spurred her stout husband.

"But why they ever built them so jolly high——"

"Fortification, Gerald, fortifica——"

"Miss Theodosia Pratt and her aunt, Mrs. Ruggles, are expecting me," Peter tried.

Mrs. Ruggles? That was slightly different; there might, perhaps, be a room at liberty.

Peter bathed in a white-tiled private bathroom, dressed clean through for Theodosia, risked his inconspicuous civilian's suit. Then, having sent her a note, he parted his damp hair in a white line like a baby's, brushed down the two blond flaps to his satisfaction, and descended to the rose-and-gold reception room.

Theo, in white, fidgeting a tennis racket, waited for him alone. Peter's first impression, after he had got her hand, was one of deep shock.

"You ought," he brought out slowly, "to be—spanked."

"What? Oh, this?" Ruffling the black brush of her hair beneath a close hat.

He nodded dumbly; he had a memory of a smooth, black bus on her neck, so heavy that he had wondered it did not weight back her head.

"Don't be stupid, Peter; everybody's wearing shingles." Her laugh mocked him rather. She slipped from his painful grip; even her eyes, changing like gray water, avoided the seriousness of his. She was restless, elusive as ever.

"You were at Monaco?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't try to get over?"

"Now, Theo, you know——"

"But you were ashore?"

"Well, yes," he said honestly, though he despaired of making her understand. "You see, we had orders to stick around——"

Theo glanced at her watch.

"Gosh, honey, you do believe that I was about as sick over that as any poor——. Couldn't we," he begged, conscious of the waxed mustache at the desk, "go out into that palm garden at the side?"

But, no, Theo's Aunt Jennie might be looking for her. Theo, giving him half of her restless attention, had the coils of his bungling emotion smoothly in hand, had the thread of the conversation under a rather expert control.

Constantinople? Turkish women, Peter remembered instantly, who had a code of their own—that you could have one woman, but not two.

"The Bosphorus," he told her, "is pretty much heaven; you lie back, and a boatman in a white turban takes you up a creek to the Waters of Sweet Asia; you come back at dark with the stars out and music."

"Alone?" she darted.

"Well, yes."

Naples? American bar run by a French girl whose English had been picked up from drunken sailors.

"I stepped out of the arcade into a sure-nough revolution," Peter remembered enthusiastically. "Yells, and a

man on a balcony making a speech, and shooting."

He had two impressions of every port at which they had called: a second-hand one from the boys, a first-hand one from his own ramblings.

But Theo was fidgeting.

"These fellows," Peter deigned, "have a little gold leaf on their uniform, and they call them the fig-leaf infantry."

That brought Theo's giggle.

"Experience," she sighed; "I sure do envy you, Petey-Dink. What did you think of Paris?"

Paris? If he gave her his sharpest memory of Paris! He had wandered with Chinny, Magruger, and Kellogg one night into a café not far from the Place de l'Opera. A Frenchman had quarreled loudly with a girl at the table next to theirs, and had actually laid hands to her when she had tried to block his way past her. Peter had instinctively leaped to her defense; the Frenchman had escaped with a sneer, and had left Peter standing rigid, Chinny and Magruger and Kellogg laughing at him, the girl joining in. She was a little, blond girl in a dark, severe dress, a tiny, strictly tailored, black hat, with scarlet lips and a scarlet handanna about her shoulders. She had come over to them; had laid two fingers upon Magruger's sleeve, and his hand had covered them; had taken a wry nibble at Kellogg's American-style mustard-ham sandwich, and Kellogg had blown his smoke into her eyes; had stuck a finger into Chinny's cognac and traced a cognac mustache on his face, and Chinny had kissed her finger, her arm.

She had laughed delightedly at this complete, this perfect comprehension. The waiter had smiled, too, and had brought a little pile of stacked plates to their table, which had drawn a good-natured groan from Chinny. Peter had slumped back into his chair. Now she reached him, and settled herself deliberately, easily on Peter's knee. Peter

stiffened, not touching her, and she balanced uncomfortably, scolding him in French, while the trio roared. She was not heavy, and there was a little, reassuring nodule on the back of her neck. Peter grasped with both hands the hard edge of the table. The girl settled deeply between his arms, turned her cheek to his, and whispered.

Peter somehow got out to the street.

"A guide?" No, no! He got to the hotel, left them a note reminding them of the money, and took a third-class ticket to Theo, not even waiting for her answer to his letter.

Peter's final expression of disapproval: "She should be spanked"—which covered most of the follies of conduct of which Delaware girls were guilty—was inadequate. But Peter had another favorite maxim: "A fellow's got to draw the line somewhere," and that one seemed to fit the case better.

Paris? The top of the Eiffel Tower on a windy day was his clearest impression of Paris, and he mentioned it.

"Oh!" Theo murmured something about shops, and dancing at the Café de Paris, and loving Paris.

They were caught up, and for a moment there was nothing to say. The fine, showery leaves of a pepper tree against the window flowed to the breeze, rippled shadows over Theo. Her narrow face was dead-white, without any of that artificial orange coloring, thank Heaven; the smile stirred in her eyes like points of sun on gray water. She was so remote, so sweet, so clean.

"Come outside," he breathed, numbing rather; "please, Theo!"

She was tracing a figure on the carpet with her tennis racket.

"No!"

"Look, you remember that last night when we drove out——"

Some one moved through the hall; Theo looked up quickly; Peter waited in desperation for the woman to pass on.

"See, Theo, I've only got two days,

and I can't wait, honey. I've got to—— to know. You promised that night——"

"Look," she said brightly; "the fat lady in the lace curtain."

"Theo!"

"No, not now."

But he had her hand, was close to her with his warm, clumsy insistence.

"No," she said faintly, but she did not pull away, and her head was back, the gray eyes hazy, heavy-lidded, staring. Did she, for a moment, waver?

But Peter faltered, supplicated with all reverence:

"Will you?"

But she couldn't have forgotten that last night, how she had kissed him. Peter's hand was about her wrist, his big thumb pressed through the crystal of her watch, shattered it.

"Oh!" she cried. "Now see—stupid!"

Dazed, Joe merely sucked the blood from his thumb.

"I didn't mean to spoil your time here by telling you at first. If you hadn't made me—but you'll just have to know! I can't! Your fraternity pin—I'll give it back to you. Sorry, but I just can't!"

"The whole tennis club," bowed a smiling, dark man, stepping in between them, "waits for Miss Pratt."

"Wait! You mean I've been waiting for you; you certainly are late."

"Stopped," he murmured easily, "to find you that magazine, but they're still not in. Ah-ha! Did she have a temper and smash it?" He touched the broken watch which dangled from her hand.

"Nasty temper! Oh, Peter," she remembered; "Mr. Tomeroy, Mr. Murray." He was a dim, older man in tennis flannels; his mouth and his eyes were experienced, like those of the ship's doctor, and his manner was sure.

Theo summed up the situation for Peter. They had this tennis match. She was sorry to leave him, but perhaps Aunt Jennie—— She would see

him at dinner and dance with him afterward at the casino, perhaps.

Mr. Pomeroy took over her racket. They left Peter feeling like a stunned St. Bernard puppy.

Peter wandered through the town. People strolling, sitting in the sun, driving past in carriages; music, laughter, wash of waves; tea places, florist shops, with dazzling white awnings. Curious, how the efforts of a whole band in a band stand could come to nothing but those little trickling, thin, flute trills, watered by the Mediterranean. Then couldn't have meant—but she had meant—

He got into the casino, lost twenty of his remaining eighty francs on seven, the number he invariably backed. Should he try it once again? No, he'd need more than he had to clear out from—Theo. He saw the white ball spin, hesitate, drop to seven. Oh, well—

Peter, finding himself on the mountain edge of the town before a blue sign marked in white letters, an hour and a fraction to the name of a certain village, followed the sign. He plodded up a cobble-stoned mule track, stepping aside with absent-minded politeness for a doukey laden with brush to pass him. He was careful not to step on the black beetles in the path, until he discovered that they were olives, that he was walking on a ridge between two deep valleys terraced down, down in orchards of olives and lemons. He stopped then conscientiously for the view. Behind, the red roofs of Menton sprawled along a sea that had paled from purple to washings of gray and silver; around and ahead of him, just beyond the valleys, the Alps, ridges and sugar-loaf peaks of them, blue gray and touched with haze.

Peter climbed on. He climbed by a plaster hut with a cat asleep on the doorstep curled up in a rusted tin pan warmed by the sun. He climbed past a ripe-skinned, dirty little girl dragging

her bare toes in the dust, past a woman who carried a basket on her head with an easy, sloping stride. A kind of enchanted stillness seemed to hang over this country. A man and a woman worked silently together, gathering olives. An old woman with a goat wished him a pleasant "Good morning, monsieur," but it was like one word dropped into the hash of a century. Even the laughter of children tumbling together made no impression upon the immense, golden quiet. Peter, walking steadily, felt as though he were moving through a dream; as though all of life—Delaware, the *Charleston*, even Theo—were far away.

Abruptly he reached a town that was like a scar of gray rocks above the last olive grove. He entered a square which contained an old elm tree, a stone bench, a fountain, and not a living soul. There were buildings, a store or two—the Café de la Renaissance—but they were like buildings painted flat on an old stage back drop, and with the paint now peeling off. Dead, deserted. The town itself was hung there in stillness; the spell held.

People must live here, for a chicken wandered into the square, and a washing was draped from a window down the dark alley of a street. But what did they live on, and where did they keep themselves? Olives, perhaps, and were they all down there at work at this hour? He looked back over the stoue parapet on which he sat, down sun-dusted tops of olive trees. And why under heaven, Peter asked himself, would folks set a town up here? Fortification, yes, but fortification from what? The place must be old, centuries old from the feel of it, but even back in the Middle Ages what enemy—

Theo had said that night in Delaware—and she had said here to-day— But Peter was following idly the line of white smoke down there along the water's edge. A train. It reminded

him that he must get back to the hotel and find a train to Paris; figure out somehow about the money. The village clock struck close somewhere, but the sound was without urge, a part of the dream. Peter sat on.

He must move. If only he had a cigarette! Peter stopped before the window of a little shop which contained dusty post cards, two fly-spotted water colors of the country, tobacco, a wooden crucifix, rosaries. He entered a damp and exceedingly dark interior, close with odors and must.

"Cig-cigarettes," he sneezed.

A woman moved from the window where she had been observing him.

"Have you," asked Peter in his painful French, "Pall Mall?"

"No Pall Mall," answered a voice that stirred the dust and started in this place of whispers. "I have Abdallah, Prince de Monaco, Tanag——"

"You speak English?"

"A little. I have work, during the war, down in the village—the little flower shop. 'Au Mimosa'—monsieur know?" probed the full, vibrant voice.

"No," said Peter. "Abdallah, please." The smell, he thought, was the ghost of a dead fish contending with a very-much-alive cheese, with perhaps the breath of an onion.

"There you are, monsieur."

He struck a match, not bold eyes. She was not old, and she was not—clean. Peter moved toward the air.

"Monsieur is a stranger?" she persisted.

"Yes." He could see now. The closeness was not of space, for the room was big and deep, like a long cavern, with dark, massive beams overhead, and a great stone fireplace, walled up. The girl—she could not be much over seventeen—was barelegged with felts on her feet, wore a short, yellow dress which hung into her, and an old, red-wool shawl; her hair was drawn back smooth and tight in a great, shining black knob,

which was like Theo's had been, Peter thought dully, only she was not like Theo in any other way. No, she was plump and full, with a blood coloring beneath her warm, brown skin that deepened to the beat of her heart, and with a large, smiling, red mouth. She came out of this old, soft darkness like an orange fungus that springs amazingly from a brown leaf mold. She stood there, with her legs apart, and her dark eyes traveled slowly to Peter and rested with approval on his blond head.

Peter edged definitely toward the door.

"Monsieur wish post card? Souvenir?"

"No."

"Cigarette holder, lucky charm, box out of olive wood?"

"No."

"Or look! This old coin—this piece of eight?"

"Pieces of eight?" He caught at the magic password of his boyhood.

"But, yes! It is here." She rubbed the dust onto her bosom, passed to him the battered rim of an old, discolored coin strung on a loop of wire. "It is," she assured him, "the true earring of Pierre le Fort—Pierre, the pirate—monsieur know?"

"Pirate?" grinned Peter. "Here?"

"But, yes!" She shook her earrings of gold wire. "Look you!" She coaxed him back the length of the cavern into a small, sun-dusted room with a slit of a window, from which, with one startled blink of your eyes, you plunged down, down, two hundred feet, to the first green ledge of the valley. "Look you"—she pointed him the far water, the winding mule track—"they come often by the sea—Barbarossa, the Saracens, back of them the Lombards. This little town—it is not otherwise from all the little towns on these mountains—Roquebrune, Gorbio, St. Agnes. The pirates, they come up from the sea; they rob, they assassinate, they burn;

they go down to the sea, and they sail off, and they leave back of them the village in black smoke and the peoples—spoiled. Pierre le Fort come here by the moonlight six-seven hundred year ago. It is not otherwise from all the raids, only Pierre is—how do you say—more complete—more thorough. Pierre was had mans," she admired; "he was beeg man—dark, he was." The girl shuddered, smiling.

Peter's lips were parted in the smile of an enchanted boy. His mind stirred to old pirate names—Ringrose, Captain Peter Harris, Red Legs; to old pirate maps—"The Voyage of the Most Blessed Trinity;" to rounded oaths, and daring battles, and phrases. "They sounded the 'loath to depart' and dipped their colors."

It was very still there by the window.

"So," breathed Peter, "it's the pirates that have done for this place." The scars were pirate scars; he was here in old pirate haunts, as, with book open on his pillow, elbows, knees, and toes dug into the bedspread, he had so often dreamed of being. "Dear," he sighed wistfully.

"Not dead," she contradicted. "They past again, the little wind of them; the song of them, the strut of them, the putting out the hand and taking of them. Men!

"It is the true earring of Pierre le Fort, who wore always the piece of eight, the shell of the money—so—as the sign of his power, that he take, I sell it to monsieur," she spoke eagerly, "for ten franc—ten little franc."

A pan of soup bubbled on a little charcoal brazier. The sunny, small room was close; Peter felt the warmth from the coals, the warmth from the girl's body as she breathed beside him. He saw the blood living in her cheek, renewed with each pumping of her heart; he saw that heavy, placid weight of black hair. In all the golden stillness there was only the little bubbling of

the soup and the crow of a cock down the valley.

"I sell it to monsieur for eight franc." But the bargaining eagerness had gone from the girl's voice, and had left it drowsy, content; the black eyes were full on Peter, smiling, sleepy.

Peter was stilled. Beneath the stirring of his blood—was it to the pirates?—was sleep, fathoms of sleep, pleasant, deep, complete. Lapping up over his heart was a warmth like a pleasant, warm sea, like the Mediterranean down there. Whatever the spell, it was a part of this place, of those olive terraces, shivered now to a little, running silver, an ecstasy, now hushed to a sun-gilded peace.

"It is," she whispered, "to be like Pierre le Fort. Pierre take—he take what he wish—and nothing can touch him. It is the same with monsieur, if monsieur have the earring; monsieur take—he take what he wish." The sleepy eyes smiled.

Peter got out. He got out abruptly. He wiped his face on his sleeve. He was shot, that was it. Theo, and the girl's hair! But he was a fool and an idiot! Dirty little peasant creature in that stinking hole! Peter was sick with himself. He'd get down to the village at once and decide what he was going to do. But first he'd pull himself together. He went back to the terrace of a café, and sat at a table with a view, and ordered a bottle of wine. For the first time in his life Peter drank not aimlessly, but with a purpose, for what the wine would do to him.

The wine, or something, did a curious thing. Peter, watching the sea go down, saw a rose flush over all the mountains that was too vivid to be true. Now shadows creeping up the last unbelievably bright peak. Twilight, and olive trees running down to the sea in a silver water of their own. Only off there in the harbor lingered that strange flush of rose. Peter fixed his attention

upon the dark silhouette of an old sailing vessel which was real enough. But curiously the sailing vessel became two sailing vessels, now three, now a harborful of them, rocking down there in a sinister silence, black hulls with black rigging and black sails against that unearthly afterglow. Still more curiously the ships with their pointed prows, their complicated rigging and lateen sails, were more antiquated than the most ancient fishing boat that sails modern waters. For, two hours' distant from Peter as the dark fleet was, the details were yet clear to him, down to a double-tongued pennant that split to the breeze, and turbaned heads that moved on decks.

Darkness! The olive orchards gathered the shadows to themselves as though they loved them, and still the fleet was there, unseen, in the dark pocket of the harbor with its silly little rim of electric lights. Peter could feel it there. He ate a chop, an omelet, drank coffee and more wine, and waited.

The moon rose over Vintimille, picked out masts and dragon-tongued pennants—Peter had known it! He waited, watching steadily, scarcely daring to moisten his lips, for what he knew would happen. The pale streak of the mule path just there between the subtle mystery of olive trees at night—Peter watched that spot. Now—now at last a shadow moved across it—two shadows. They were coming, shadow after shadow, creeping up silently!

A scream—the watchman rousing the town too late, Peter exulted. The fool—the sleeping dog-of-a-fool! Sounds of fright and confusion; people running, doors slamming, a child crying; now a bell—the church bell ringing the alarm.

Peter laughed. All the blood was in his face. He himself was down there on the mule path, a shadow with a cut-throat, beckoning them on.

He laughed again. Peter found him-

self standing, the bone-handled cut-throat knife grasped firmly in his upraised hand, the proprietor of the café staring at him in consternation. The exact gesture with which, on a picnic holiday some ten years before, Peter had played Morgan himself, frightening his small sister into spasms—he remembered it perfectly.

"Anything more, monsieur?"

"No; the amount, please," said Peter, striving for dignity.

Funny business! Yet there was nothing: a quiet night, the lights of Menton, the shadow of a branch across the mule path. This pink, fringed napkin was identical with the napkins which had always spelled picnics for them in those kid days. What was it had started him? Oh, the rim of the piece of eight; Peter suddenly hankered for it with the intensity of a boy who hankers for a penknife. He couldn't go back to the shop for it himself, but he could send—yes, Peter tore the paper from his cigarette box, scribbled on it, by the light from a window, a line, folded into it a ten-franc note, and made the proprietor understand what he wanted.

He waited for the man in the square, jingling the little pocketful of francs left him. The light was far back in the shop; from her dark doorway, Peter seemed to feel the girl watching him. He stepped backward into a shadow, but listened toward her with that odd, pleasant tingling. Fool! He tried to anchor himself to Theo, remembered. He must go down.

But listening still, looking out from his ink shadow upon a stone parapet gray white from the moon, he caught again a movement, a clamor—faint at first, now unmistakable, pounding in his head. The rustle of stealthy footsteps, the clink of arms. Surely it was a lantern, that smoked and antique light which bobbed agitatedly toward him. An old man with bags over his shoulder. He crossed the square, set down

his lantern, tugged at a flagstone, deposited his bags, and dropped the stone back again with a thud against the night. Peter shivered. Now a soldier, a great, hulking fellow, stumbling up through sleep, buckling himself into coat and sword. A woman in a white cap leaning out from the balcony of that stone house opposite, drawing back in sudden fear. Sound of a bolt—silence. The silence of tense waiting. Ah, at last, that hammering upon the gate, that splintering, imperative shattering of the gate!

Pierre le Fort? Peter le Fort! He was barely conscious that he had taken the earring from the proprietor, that the man was bidding him good night. It was Peter himself who stood outside the gate, a cutlass in one hand, a pistol in the other, who beat upon the gate, called down curses and imprecations, cried on his men.

"God and the devil," said Peter, summoning up from some boy's limbo of unexpurgated outlaw literature an oath. "God and the devil take you if you do not open!" Now a shot—Peter's shot—the signal! They were coming on, Chinny and Kellogg and Magruger, not laughing at him now, but following him, seeing him as a man who took what he wanted! They had burst through, were spilling into the square, Peter at the head of them.

Torches running everywhere, the crack and blaze of pistols, shrieks of victory and shrieks of defeat. Peter braced himself, his two legs, and struck out.

He strode, he swaggered down a trench of a street of thick, piled blackness. He felt himself in loose boots, hitched up a broad belt with double holsters. If the infrequent lights which struggled against the gloom of high, cherishing stone walls were electric lights, and if the softness upon which Peter sometimes stepped was more likely a pile of rotting lemons than

the body of a cut-down enemy, yet surely this narrow, cobbled street twisted and dipped, led now to the right to a blind alley, and plunged now to the left below houses and vaulted arches, in a way no sane, twentieth-century street would ever do. Surely, too, it was the iron of a Middle Age grilled window at which Peter caught once; and it was the worn wood of an old, old door with ancient, hammered nails which his unsteady hand fumbled another time. Almost as surely it was a cloaked figure which slid by a dim corner out of Peter's path. And there was not the slightest doubt in Peter's mind that the silence of the houses was that of people crouching, hiding treasure. Do them no good! By golly-whiz! But now the pad-pad of running sandals. A priest, skirted, bald-headed for an instant under the light. So he thought to make way with the church treasure, did he?

Peter followed. He broke, panting, through a door, was jerked up abruptly by the cold, wavering whiteness of a little plaster cathedral. No priest—no one at all; he was alone in the little church, which was candlelit as though for a special mass.

"Christmas!" said Peter, pressing a chilly hand to his burning face. Plaster angels, a virgin, pink flowers under glass jars, some pathetic gift wheat. Peter's mind ran to other church loot: silver altar pieces and chalices, golden crucifixes and statuettes. "Not much 'dew of heaven' here," he grinned, recalling the old pirate phrase. But the two candles on either side of the Virgin were blurring and mingling in a most curious fashion; Peter groped for the air.

He stood again by the parapet. Peter laughed at himself, at the silly pipe dream. Yet below the laugh, the bubbling lightness which he felt, was the solid weight of an unreasoning anger. He felt let down, balked, as though some one had undammed a stream in him and had given it no out-

let. He felt as he had used to when he had committed the worst atrocities of his childhood. He experienced a surge of the most intense bitterness against Magruger, who had failed him with the money, against—yes, against Theo, who had broken her promise to him.

It came down over Peter again. It came at him suddenly and concretely in the person of a fellow in armor and plumes. Below the raised visor Peter could see his face—sophisticated, supercilious, with a look to the eyes and the mouth.

"A prince!" scoffed Peter derisively. A prince flourishing a tennis racket. But no, it was a cold, slim rapier. A very fever of fury seized Peter. He went up to the fellow! He, Peter Murray, was Blackbeard himself—Blackbeard straddled there in rakish felt hat, silk coat and breeches—Blackbeard, with chest out, fighting his last glorious battle. Killed, did he? Let him kill! The ship's doctor, Pomeroy, Alchin, Magruger, Kellogg—the knight in armor was all of these, one after the other, shifting, mocking. Peter fought them all, but he fought chiefly smug eyes and a knowing mouth which did not change, fought with a hatred and a viciousness sounded by five months of wincing under them and losing out to them, with the climax of Theo. It was a silent combat—strange the number of times steel met steel without sound. The outcome was uncertain, for the fellow merely melted away, still smiling, and left Peter alone in the moonlit square with all his pitched emotions. Peter was backed against the parapet, from which he had perhaps not moved, and the intensity of the conflict was measured only by the pressure with which his hands gripped the solid stone.

Nothing—nothing at all. He must—go down.

Ah, but something! Voices quarreling down there in the olive grove—one voice

full and vibrant, which scattered ghosts. Peter pulled himself upright, listened. The low burr of a man's anger—no doubt about it. Peter's blood surged to it. He swaggered gallantly, eagerly, down the hill to her defense, striding now over a grassy level, now plunging down a treacherous, rock-faced step.

In a moon-white patch he found her face, tear-stained, but gazing to see him. The man—Peter tackled first a thick olive trunk, but he found him, too. Peter knew from his breathing that he was a heavy man, and swarthy; he spilled foreign words, which Peter did not answer; he had a mustache in which Peter's fingers tangled once. Beyond that he was too much for Peter, a broad, sure, wall of a man against the boy's slim and awkward body. But so much the better! Peter had at last a substantial opponent, with a chance of a real victory. Solid flesh beneath his fat! He was Blackbeard, Morgan, Pierre le Fort, all condensed into one. They gripped silently, rolled now on soft ground, now over a terrace with the loose stones clattering after them. Sword snapped at the hilt, did it? Well, his good old fist wouldn't—snap at the—hilt! Peter had him now; he had him proper. One more smash—the fellow grunted and relaxed. Peter spraddled him, laughed; he hitched up his belt, laughed again.

Now the girl. Her eyes were on Peter's face, and Peter met them full.

"Come here!" She tugged him away from the man. She smiled at Peter in the moonlight, and Peter smiled back.

"Here." She had his hand. "Blood here—here." She touched his face. "I know a little—water."

She had him down, away from the village, in the soft darkness of olive trees, on the soft grass of a terrace. A splitting of cloth, now cold water to his face. Peter, sitting there, clutched two handfuls of the turf; he lifted his face obediently. She had the wet, cold cloth

on his cheek, his forehead; Peter shivered. She had her hand in his blond hair, teasing it. She was crowding him, and Peter put his arms around her. His hand touched the smooth knob of her hair, cupped it. Piracy was in his blood, and all about him was the clog-ging sweetness of some mimosa in bloom, very close.

He told her good-by at the gate.

"That fellow—he won't bother you again."

"My man."

"What?" Peter stared at her in horror.

She laughed.

His second sensation was one of relief. Well, if she could see humor— He twisted the thickness in his throat into a laugh of his own; the laugh ended the first phase of Peter's life.

She lifted her mouth, and Peter kissed it.

"You come back?"

"Yes, I come back." He knew that it was a lie, that he would not come back.

Peter went down to the village. There was a lightness to him, but he was seeing quite clearly. Stars, a million of them, sharper and whiter than anything in the heavens of Delaware; he'd like to see Bob Reilly count these, he thought, remembering a kid game they had played, lying out on the top of old Graysen's hill. But of a sudden Peter couldn't face the stars.

He didn't care—didn't care!

"'Copper charms and silver trinkets from the chests of Spanish crews,' he sang, just to prove to himself that he didn't care. Treasure! Down this very path they had come, laughing, singing, staggering under the loot. Lucky she was married.

"'Gold doubloons and double mai-dores, louis d'ors and Portuguese.'" She didn't even know his name, nor he hers; he was leaving, but even if he

weren't leaving, in a town of a dozen hotels, among seven thousand tourists— Which reminded Peter of his pressing need of money. Ten bells by the village clock; he'd still have time.

Peter went into the casino. He staked ten of his remaining forty francs on seven, and won. He played seven consistently and with assurance, and won more than he lost. He was conscious that Theo was looking on, that she was impatiently refusing to return to the dance floor with Pomeroy.

"Play three," she commanded once.

"No, seven." Peter left at the end of an hour with two hundred and fifty-two francs in his pocket—enough to pay his hotel bill and get him back to Paris.

He stopped in a place and asked about trains. He loafed back along the Mediterranean, listening to the busy crunch of gravel beneath the rollers, content with the prospect of sleep—sleep.

In the hotel Theo rose up to meet him; she was in white, a-shimmer with tiny crystal beads like water drops. Peter could not look at her.

"I've been waiting for you," she confessed hurriedly. "Look, Pety-Dink, I didn't want you to—to get me wrong. You didn't get me wrong?"

"No," said Peter, his eyes on the carpet. "I'm leaving to-morrow morning; you were right."

"You're not leaving so soon!"

"Unless"—he was startled into looking—"unless you want me to stay."

"Well——"

"Do you," asked Peter with a new poise, "want me to stay?"

But Theo was staring at him, puzzling over him.

"Yes, I—want you to stay." The palest hyacinth flush marked her clear, white pallor; but still she probed, the pucker deepening.

Peter stood quite still. He was gazing at her with the old solemn seriousness.

"You're sure?"

"Sure," she said faintly; there was a flutter, a little thrill about her.

There was no thrill to Peter; he might almost have been weighing her.

"Horrid to—make me say it." She flashed him the old, quick smile, and he paid her back with a ready coin, not the old Peterish, dead-slow-in-coming smile.

"Peter," she followed quickly, jealously, "where have you been all this day? Tennis, and I thought you might come over, and then dinner and dancing, and I watched for you. Where?"

"I've been——" He took a breath and tried again: "I've been leaning over a balustrade thinking of you."

"A muddy balustrade?" she scoffed, with an eye for his bedraggled suit. "All the afternoon! You don't expect me to believe it! Some girl——"

"All afternoon, thinking of you alone."

"Well, I don't believe——"

She was waiting rather breathlessly. But, oh, God, he couldn't, not to-night. Peter was staring at the place where Theo's knob would have been if she hadn't cut it off; he was glad it wasn't there.

The Frenchman of the waxed mustache with a telegram.

"For me?" asked Peter curiously.

"For monsieur," he bowed, entirely respectful.

So they hadn't forgotten him! Good old eggs! You could count on them.

Bay her says Chimny a Spanish comb with rhinestones ask Chimny he's tried it. Brethren of the Main.

They must have made a good old haul, and it was like them to squander a hunk of it on an idiotic, fifty-word telegram. But he'd do better than rhinestones!

"We'll go out," announced Peter to Theodosia, "to that palm garden at the side while I tell you——"

"You remember," probed Theo, "that silly gold heart of mine, and how you vowed you'd keep it for ever and ever."

"Got it," Peter declared; "got it here, now." He delved, brought up nothing in tin-foil, delved again.

"What——" She pounced upon the curious carring. "Give it to me!"

"No. It's—— I can't."

"Where did you get it, and what——"

"'S nothing—watch charm."

"But the heart—my heart?" she pressed, with her new suspicion of him.

It was gone; Peter knew it.

"It's a funny thing," he invented glibly, "but it must be in—in the pocket of my other suit."